



BIBLICAL REASONING

CHRISTOLOGICAL AND TRINITARIAN
RULES FOR EXEGESIS

R. B. JAMIESON AND TYLER R. WITTMAN

BIBLICAL REASONING

CHRISTOLOGICAL AND TRINITARIAN
RULES FOR EXEGESIS

**R. B. JAMIESON
AND TYLER R. WITTMAN**


Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group © 2022
Used by permission.

Contents

Acknowledgments ix
Abbreviations xi
Note on Sources xv
Introduction: *Theology for Better Exegesis* xvii

PART ONE

BIBLICAL REASONING

1. Seek His Face Always: *The End of Biblical Reasoning* 3
2. The School of Christ: *The Pedagogical Context of Biblical Reasoning* 23
3. The Curriculum of Christ: *The Source and Practice of Biblical Reasoning* 41

PART TWO

CHRISTOLOGICAL AND TRINITARIAN RULES FOR EXEGESIS

4. Worthy Are You: *Understanding Scripture as Honoring God* 63
5. The LORD Is One: *The Trinity's Unity and Equality in Scripture's Twofold Discourse* 91
6. Varieties of Activities but the Same God: *The Trinity's Inseparable Operations and Scripture's Appropriation* 106

7. One and the Same: *The Unity of Christ and Scripture's Communication of Idioms* 126
 8. Greater Than Himself and Less Than Himself: *Christ's Two Natures and Scripture's Partitive Discourse* 153
 9. God from God: *From Missions to Processions* 179
 10. Putting the Rule-Kit to Work: *Reading John 5:17–30* 213
- Conclusion: *From Glory to Glory* 235
- Appendix: *Table of Principles and Rules* 239
- Bibliography 243
- Subject Index 267
- Author Index 273
- Scripture and Other Ancient Sources Index 277

Introduction

Theology for Better Exegesis

In this entryway to the book we introduce its goal, the resources on which it draws, and the plan by which it progresses. We conclude by commenting briefly on the book’s audiences and authors.

Goal

Our goal in this book is to assemble a toolkit for biblical reasoning. The toolkit’s goal is to enable better exegesis. The goal of that exegesis is, ultimately, to see God.

Hence, by “better exegesis” we mean exegesis that is not only more adequate to the text itself but also, especially, more adequate to the ultimate reality to which the text bears witness and more adequate to the text’s ultimate goal. That reality is the triune God and that goal is the sight of God’s face that will eternally satisfy our souls.

What is “biblical reasoning”? We take the phrase and framework from a seminal essay by John Webster.¹ According to Webster, biblical reasoning is “the redeemed intellect’s reflective apprehension of God’s gospel address through the embassy of Scripture, enabled and corrected by God’s presence, and having fellowship with him as its end.”² Webster distinguishes within biblical reasoning two overlapping, mutually informing modes of reasoning:

1. Webster, “Biblical Reasoning.”
2. Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 128.

exegetical and dogmatic. Exegetical reasoning is the act of “following the words of the text.” This act is theologically and epistemologically primary. To run in the wake of the apostles and prophets is every theologian’s chief obligation and should be their chief delight.³ Dogmatic reasoning “produces a conceptual representation of what reason has learned from its exegetical following of the scriptural text. In dogmatics, the ‘matter’ of prophetic and apostolic speech is set out in a different idiom, anatomized.”⁴ Exegetical reasoning attends to the order and flow of the text, following its twists and turns; dogmatic reasoning attends to the theological claims of the text, looking along and with the text to discern the ultimate reality to which it bears witness. Neither is complete without the other; both move from and toward one another in a continual, mutually informative exchange. Dogmatic reasoning enables readers of Scripture to locate major concerns of the text quickly and easily, to perceive Scripture “in its full scope as an unfolding of the one divine economy,” to see Scripture’s unity and interrelations, and to discern its proportions. With this sense of scope and proportion that dogmatic reasoning provides, exegetical reasoning is better equipped to discover the fullness present in discrete prophetic and apostolic discourses.⁵ Embracing both intellectual activities in an organic process, “biblical reasoning” keeps them from neglecting each other.

On Webster’s reckoning, theology is therefore not a movement *away* from Scripture toward some distant logical synthesis. Instead, theology thinks from Scripture, with Scripture, and to Scripture. Scripture is thus systematic theology’s origin and goal.⁶ When rightly pursued, theology comes from and returns to Scripture in order to hear and confess ever more faithfully God’s gospel address, which has fellowship with God in Christ as its end. Hence, biblical reasoning maintains a continual concern for personal knowledge of, and conformity to, Scripture’s ultimate subject matter. In turn, the organic processes of exegetical and dogmatic reasoning are both oriented toward, and critically normed by, the triune God. As we will argue in the first three chapters, biblical reasoning is therefore that form of attention to Holy Scripture that is taught by God, teaches about God, and leads to God.

In our adopting the mantle of “biblical reasoning,” one of our key concerns is to rightly relate what should not be kept separate: exegesis and systematic theology. To introduce this central theme, we will consider a common model for relating these two and indicate respects in which we aim to improve upon

3. Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 130.

4. Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 130–31.

5. Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 131.

6. Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” 148.

it.⁷ Many construe the relation between exegesis and doctrine as that between raw material and its development. For instance, in an exegetical work on the Trinity, Ben Witherington and Laura Ice assert that the NT provides “raw data” that the church’s theologians later synthesized into a “developed doctrine of the Trinity.”⁸ There is more than an element of truth in this model. Further, all analogies have limits, and we should not push this one beyond its intended scope. However, the notion of doctrine as the development of raw biblical or exegetical material has significant liabilities and is at least potentially misleading. It implies a one-way arrow from exegesis to doctrine: from raw material to finished product, from foundation to superstructure. It also implies a substantive, material difference between the respective products of each. No one would mistake a car for its unassembled constituent components. Further, it also implies that systematic theology in some sense improves upon the undeveloped deliverances of Scripture.

Hence, this model obscures two key aspects of the symbiotic relationship between exegetical and dogmatic reasoning that this work will develop and defend. First, as we will discuss further below, there is a crucial sense in which exegetical and dogmatic reasoning say the same thing in different words. To put it more formally: when rightly defined and practiced, the goals and products of exegetical and dogmatic reasoning harmonize, complement, and inform each other. Each aims at understanding and representing the apostles’ and prophets’ witness to the reality of God and the relation of all things to God. Second, rather than implying a one-way arrow from exegesis to dogmatics, a proper construal of their relationship recognizes two-way traffic between them. Dogmatic judgments and concepts that are properly derived from exegesis can enrich and direct exegesis. Dogmatic reasoning is every bit as much a mode of reading Scripture as exegetical reasoning. As the Heidelberg Reformer Zacharias Ursinus put it, the purpose of studying doctrine is “that we may be well prepared for the reading, understanding, and exposition of the holy Scriptures. For as the doctrine of the catechism and

7. Our discussion is informed by that of Swain, “The Bible and the Trinity in Recent Thought,” 39–40.

8. Witherington and Ice, *The Shadow of the Almighty*, xi. Similarly, though in a more subjective, experiential idiom, see Fee, “Paul and the Trinity,” 51. Cf. also Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” 7, who describes the role of the “contents of revelation” in the discipline of systematic theology as “the material for a human work of classifying and systematizing according to logical principles.” See the instructive critique of Vos’s position in Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” 146–48. While the work of systematic theology is certainly a human work of classifying (as exegesis and biblical theology are as well), it is structured not by “logical principles” but by the triune God and the economy of his works. Systematic theology is therefore no less concerned than other disciplines with the historical sequence of God’s works.

Common Places are taken out of the Scriptures, and are directed by them as their rule, so they again lead us, as it were, by the hand to the Scriptures.”⁹

As much or perhaps more than they erect a superstructure upon Scripture, dogmatic judgments discern just the reverse: a substructure. Rather than climbing out of the text, dogmatic judgments, as it were, plunge beneath the surface of the text’s discrete assertions. In other words, dogmatic reasoning discerns what must be the case if everything Scripture says is true.¹⁰ Further, rather than treating dogmatics as an intellectual development that, at least implicitly, improves upon the raw material of Scripture, we will treat theology as the grammar of Scripture.¹¹ As Scott Swain observes, “What we have in the Bible is well-formed Trinitarian discourse: primary, normative, fluent.”¹² Dogmatic reasoning attends to this primary discourse in order to discern its conceptual order and inner connections and comment reflectively on it. By way of analogy, consider the kindergarten-level sentence “She hit the ball to him.” There is a sense in which the grammatical terms “subject,” “verb,” “object,” and “indirect object” add nothing to the text. They simply describe the words of the sentence in their ordered syntactical relations. Yet the grammatical analysis operates at a higher level of abstraction than the sentence itself. The words are all longer and take more work to understand and relate. However, this abstraction and conceptualization serves understanding. The grammatical terms grant purchase on the text so that one can understand not only what it says but also why it is ordered and formed as it is. Similarly, when understood as grammar, dogmatic concepts and judgments cannot improve upon the text but only enable us to understand why it is ordered and formed as it is.

Toward this end, throughout the book we will assemble a biblical reasoning toolkit—or, more precisely, a biblical reasoning “rule-kit.” The body of the book articulates a set of theological principles and their corresponding exegetical rules.¹³ Each principle is a doctrinal commitment, a constituent element of the catholic Christian faith. Each rule turns an aspect of that principle into an exegetical guideline and guardrail, “operationalizing” a theological principle for exegetical purposes. If the principles articulate the grammar of Scripture, then the rules merely show us how to read Scripture with the grain of its own grammar. Our articulation and development of these principles

9. Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 10.

10. Similarly, S. R. Holmes, “Scripture in Liturgy and Theology,” 117.

11. For theology as “grammar” in this sense, see, e.g., Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, 256; Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, 81, 94–96, 125–26, 170.

12. Swain, “The Bible and the Trinity in Recent Thought,” 40.

13. For a full table of the rules and principles, see the appendix.

is deliberately spare. We aim to offer not exhaustive doctrinal discussion of these core Christian teachings but only their exegetical on-ramps.

Speaking of exegesis, ours will receive much help from learned, contemporary, historically minded biblical scholarship. At the same time, we will frequently dissent from common presuppositions of, and conclusions widely held by, modern biblical scholars. Further, while we cannot justify every exegetical decision to the extent that we would if this were a biblical studies monograph, we aim to make exegetical arguments that professional biblical scholars will take seriously.

Our principles and rules cluster primarily around two mutually illuminating foci: the Trinity and the person of Christ. Why this dual focus? The first reason is material. The identity of the God who speaks in his Word and saves us by sending his Son and Spirit is at the heart of God's gospel address. To penetrate more deeply into the gospel is to penetrate more deeply into the mysteries of the Trinity and the Son's incarnation, and vice versa. Another reason for our focus on Christ and the Trinity is that this is where the divorce between biblical studies and theology has been felt most painfully. Creedal Christian teaching about the person of Christ and the Trinity enjoys broad ecumenical consensus. These central doctrines define and distinguish the Christian faith. Yet these are among the doctrines treated with most skepticism by the contemporary biblical studies guild. The breach between theology and exegesis that we aim to help repair is widest here.

Talk of theological "rules" for exegesis may cause some biblical scholars to balk. Shouldn't exegesis be protected from prior dogmatic commitments? Hasn't historical criticism freed Scripture from the shackles of creedal constraint?¹⁴ To offer an initial response to this concern, we would distinguish between two kinds of rules, which we might call extrinsic and intrinsic. An extrinsic rule is imposed from without. A nearby street has a speed limit of twenty-five miles per hour. That limit could easily be revised up or down by the relevant authority. By contrast, consider the link between life and breath in human beings. It is a rule that a living human being breathes. Where you see someone breathing, there you see someone living. No dead person breathes. No breath, no life; no life, no breath. This rule enables rapid, reliable judgments about what a situation calls for. If someone is suddenly unable to breathe, that must be remedied, or grave consequences will quickly follow. The rule "breath = life" is not extrinsic but intrinsic. It derives from the material

14. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith*, 5: "It is common knowledge that modern biblical criticism only became a recognizable discipline through the process of explicit severing of the Bible from classic theological formulations." Watson, "Trinity and Community," 169, offers grounds for skepticism of this scholarly anti-trinitarianism.

constitution of a human being. One of the primary arguments of this book is that the exegetical rules we will promulgate are not extrinsic but intrinsic. They derive from, and therefore rightly regulate our dealings with, the material content of Scripture.

Hence, we aim to show that these doctrines are more biblical than many think and that a right reading of Scripture requires more theology than many are willing to grant. Because they are distilled from a right reading of Scripture, classical doctrines about Christ and the Trinity constitute a well-stocked keychain that can open exegetical doors that would otherwise remain shut in the face of modern exegetical conventions.

Resources

In laying out a series of theologically molded rules for exegesis, we are self-consciously following in the footsteps of Augustine, especially his work *The Trinity*. Further, by deriving exegetical rules from theological principles, we are recovering and redeploying an approach that flourished in ancient Christian hermeneutical handbooks such as Tyconius's *Liber regularum*.¹⁵ More broadly, this work is an act of critically retrieving the kind of theological culture that shaped biblical interpretation in the fourth century.¹⁶ Specifically, we aim to retrieve key elements of the theological anthropology and exegetical practices that proved integral to the formation of fourth-century trinitarian theology and many of the christological decisions in the following centuries.

Two caveats are important here. First, “retrieval” is not naïve nostalgia for a golden era that never existed. Instead, it is a matter of standing within a stream of thought as an active and critical, not passive and partisan, participant. We aim to retrieve some of the exegetical practices from the fourth and fifth centuries that have had enduring appeal, but not uncritically.¹⁷ At

15. See Toom, “Early Christian Handbooks on Interpretation.” We are critically appropriating the distinction between “principles” and “rules” from Froehlich, *Sensing the Scriptures*, 17–20. As we employ this distinction, principles are the grammar and source of the ways various parts of Scripture speak as they do about God and Christ. The rules are guidelines that correspond to these principles and are therefore intrinsic to Scripture itself.

16. For an account of pro-Nicene theological culture, see Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, esp. 414–25.

17. Why critically retrieve fourth- and fifth-century exegetical practices? As Sanders, *The Triune God*, 177, puts it, “It is senseless to try to retain the result of the early church’s holistic interpretation of Scripture—the perception of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity—without cultivating, in a way appropriate for our own time, the interpretative practice that produced that result.” Too often, theologians attempt to repeat the findings of the early centuries without inhabiting the exegesis and culture that shaped those findings, or by maintaining too combative a stance toward the real gains made in modern biblical interpretation.

several points we attempt to provide these practices with a more solid footing in Scripture, and in this we are undoubtedly and gratefully shaped by modern biblical interpretation.¹⁸ Second, we aim to retrieve the spiritually formative and moral dimensions of exegesis. God's gospel address in Scripture generates the kind of theological culture in which the reader is not a neutral subject dissecting the text as an inert object. If God speaks in Scripture, then reading Scripture is a matter of listening to God. The reader is therefore a proper object of theological reflection. Theological exegesis is, minimally, textual interpretation that reflects on the nature and ends of the reader in light of the God who addresses us in Scripture.¹⁹

In terms of modern thinkers, in addition to John Webster we owe a special debt to David Yeago and Kavin Rowe. In a widely influential essay, Yeago has argued that biblical exegesis stands to benefit from distinguishing between concepts and judgments.²⁰ In the simplest terms, a judgment is what a biblical text or theologian is saying about God, and a concept is the way the text or theologian is saying it. Yeago's point is that one can render essentially the same judgment using a variety of concepts.²¹ While not identical in every respect, there is a crucial sense in which Nicaea's *homoousios* and Paul's "form of God" (Phil. 2:6) say the same thing about Jesus.

In a series of insightful essays, Kavin Rowe has developed a closely complementary framework of "biblical pressure."²² As we will discuss more fully in chapters to follow, in Rowe's account, "the biblical text is not inert but instead exerts a pressure ('coercion') upon its interpreters and asserts itself within theological reflection and discourse such that there is (or can be) a profound continuity, grounded in the subject matter itself, between the biblical text and traditional Christian exegesis and theological formulation."²³ The pressure of Scripture not only enables but requires us to confess that the one God of Israel is the triune God who reveals himself in Jesus. Hence, "The ontological judgments of the early ecumenical Creeds were the only satisfying and

18. See here Sanders, *The Triune God*, 155–89. Sanders rightly eschews a simplistic turning back of the clock and embraces the contributions of modern biblical scholarship, especially its "enhanced literary sensibility and alertness to narrative reasoning." However, we must use these contributions "better, more fully, and more strategically" (179).

19. See here esp. Webster, "Hermeneutics in Modern Theology"; also Sarisky, *Reading the Bible Theologically*, 198–238.

20. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma."

21. A qualifier such as "essentially" is crucial; see Yeago's subsequent clarifications in "The Bible," 64–65.

22. Rowe, "Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics"; Rowe, "Luke and the Trinity"; Rowe, "For Future Generations"; Rowe, "The Trinity in the Letters of St Paul and Hebrews."

23. Rowe, "Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics," 308.

indeed logical outcome of the claims of the New Testament read together with the Old.”²⁴

The metaphor of pressure implies agent, object, means, and purpose. God is the agent. His redeemed people are the object. Scripture wielded by the enlivening Spirit and reflected on by regenerated reason is the means. Finally, the purpose is transformative knowledge and covenantal fellowship with the triune God, with the beatific vision as the ultimate fruition of this purpose. As we deploy and develop Rowe’s metaphor throughout the book, we will offer close readings of how Scripture characterizes each of these elements in God’s economy of divine teaching.

Some readers may wonder whether the book they are holding is a work of “Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (TIS). Certainly we have learned much from, and appreciate many elements of, work that has been done under that heading. If someone were to apply that label to our work, we would offer little objection, though we would also see little gain. We find the phrase to be overly broad, with little descriptive value.²⁵ Further, we are far more interested in doing theological interpretation than in theorizing it.²⁶ Theological interpretation is justified by its exegetical children; by the fruits of our readings you may know us.

Plan

The first three chapters locate biblical reasoning within the economy of divine teaching, in which the nature and ends of Scripture and its readers come to light. These chapters form something of a methodological preamble to the book, with principles and rules that warrant the procedure that the rest of the book undertakes. Chapters 4–9 will then generally follow a four-part structure: biblical pressure, theological grammar, the rule or rules, and exegetical application of the rule(s). Chapter 10 recapitulates and seals the argument of the entire book, applying the full “rule-kit” to the exegesis of a single passage, John 5:17–30.

After theologically describing the teleology of Scripture’s readers and the shape of God’s teaching activity in the first two chapters, in chapter 3 we

24. Rowe, “Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics,” 308. We will discuss all these matters in far more detail in chap. 3.

25. In appreciating the fruits of TIS while being skeptical of its utility as a rallying cry, our perspective resonates with that of M. Allen, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology—Part Two,” 349–51, who sympathetically evaluates TIS as a “crisis measure.”

26. While we crafted our agenda independently of it and only read the article late in this book’s writing, there is a sense in which our entire work answers Wesley Hill’s recent call for not just theological interpretation but specifically doctrinal exegesis. See Hill, “In Defense of ‘Doctrinal Exegesis.’”

consider the ontology and function of Scripture within that activity. There we will explain in more detail what biblical reasoning looks like in practice. In chapter 4 we articulate a principle and a rule that mark God's qualitative difference from all things as their creator and that remind us to read Scripture's depictions of God in a manner befitting the canon's witness to his holy, infinite, transcendent existence. After thus considering God with regard to his singular essence, our remaining principles and rules consider God with regard to the distinction of persons in the Trinity. In this respect, our order of expounding these rules follows the order of the two Testaments. Chapters 5 and 6 will develop trinitarian rules for exegesis, chapters 7 and 8 christological ones, and then chapter 9 considers the Son and the Spirit from the standpoint of their relations to the other divine persons. The first three rules form the indispensable foundation for and background of the last seven, and the last seven enable us to articulate the identity of the Father, Son, and Spirit in ways that fit with the first three.

Audiences and Authors

The intended audience of this book includes both biblical scholars and theologians. For most of the church's history, those were two names for one thing. But over the past four centuries, tall, durable walls have been erected between what are now considered two disciplines.²⁷ We hope to engage practitioners of both. We aim to convince biblical scholars that exegesis requires more theology than they commonly admit, and we aim to convince theologians that theology requires more exegesis than they typically do.²⁸ While the disciplinary division between biblical studies and theology has some heuristic and practical value, we believe that, all told, it does more harm than good.²⁹ Hence, following Webster, we instead distinguish between exegetical and dogmatic reasoning as two primary elements in the larger task of "biblical reasoning."

Depending on which side of the disciplinary divide a reader's training and interests fall, parts of the book may call for patience. Biblical scholars who have little concern for theological place-setting may want to skim or skip the first three chapters and begin in earnest either with the latter half of chapter 3

27. For an important slice of the relevant history, see Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*.

28. For the latter point, see esp. Watson, "The Scope of Hermeneutics," 74. Watson's broader comments on the consequences of the policed boundary between biblical studies and theology are penetrating (72–74).

29. On the deleterious consequences of the divisions between biblical studies and theology and between Old and New Testament scholarship, see Watson, *Text and Truth*, 6.

or with chapter 4. Then again, perhaps such readers stand to profit the most from the theological provocations of the first three chapters. The argument is cumulative and builds on itself; the whole can persuade far better than any of the parts taken alone. Those who skip the first part yet go on to find the exegesis and theological reasoning of later chapters worth consideration may wish to double back for the larger context. Conversely, those who skim for doctrinal portions while skipping the exegesis will miss the argument entirely.

This book not only has two audiences; it also has two authors. The “we” throughout this book will be not conventional, much less royal, but real. This book synthesizes the sensitivities and skills of one author trained in systematic theology and one in biblical studies. Tyler Wittman drafted chapters 1–6 and the conclusion; R. B. Jamieson drafted chapters 7–10 and this introduction. While we have thoroughly revised each other’s chapters, we have not imposed a strict uniformity of style. Given our differing primary vocations, one might notice more Latin scholasticisms in the earlier chapters and more sermonic illustrations in the later chapters. Nevertheless, we both fully endorse the full product.

PART ONE

BIBLICAL REASONING

1

Seek His Face Always

The End of Biblical Reasoning

Principle 1: Holy Scripture presupposes and fosters readers whose end is the vision of Christ’s glory, and therein eternal life. Biblical reasoning must be ordered to this same end.

In this initial chapter we consider one of the primary goals of Scripture and the exegetical means of attaining this goal. Destinations, after all, determine pilgrimages. Likewise, construction materials cohere because of what they build, and an education is more than busy work only in light of a curriculum with particular goals. All of these examples point out the fact that to steer things appropriately we must first know the end (*telos*) at which we aim. Hence, we must first consider the end of biblical reasoning so that we may aim at it.

This distinction between an end and our aiming points to how “ends” are distinct from “purposes” in at least one crucial respect. The end of something is grounded in its nature, whereas any given purpose is grounded in a will. Ends are objective and purposes more subjective. Sometimes purposes align with ends, but not always. For instance, a toddler may purpose that a toilet serve as a bathtub for his father’s Bible. Yet that toilet remains fit for some things and unfit for others; the end of the toilet—not to mention the Bible—clashes with these toddlerian purposes. Other examples are ready to hand: no one brushes their teeth with motor oil; people do not go to

the airport to purchase groceries; penguins are useless when you need a doctor (and vice versa). Why? Given what these things are, they flourish in the pursuit of certain ends and flounder in other pursuits. Given the ends of these things, some purposes are fitting and others are not. So too with the reading of Scripture. But we can grasp how ends bear upon our reading of Scripture only if we have some idea of our own ends as readers and of Scripture's ends in light of what God is doing in and through it for his people. Crucially, these ends must be discerned not from general psychological, anthropological, or sociological analysis but from the overall shape of the Christian faith.

Our purpose in this chapter will therefore be to begin laying the foundation for the project of “biblical reasoning” that this book proposes. Starting with “ends,” we are concerned here with justifying and elucidating our first principle: *Holy Scripture presupposes and fosters readers whose end is the vision of Christ's glory, and therein eternal life. Biblical reasoning must be ordered to this same end.* The following chapters will build on this end, looking backward and forward to it as the destination of our exegetical and theological activity.

We start by looking at Christ and what certain key moments of his teaching suggest about the chief end of his disciples, which is summarized in the concept of the beatific vision, or the sight of God that renders us blessed. Then we will explore how this same end requires that we undergo the purification of our vision through faith that works by love. Finally, we will consider how faith and sight are distinguished and yet related, especially in the notion of contemplation, which is both shaped by exegesis and shapes exegesis.

Beholding Christ's Glory

We often hear a great deal about approaching the Bible with a hermeneutic centered on some fundamental theme like the gospel, salvation history, or even Christ. But in such discussions far less tends to be said about the truths on which even these themes are centered. If our reading of Scripture is going to center on something, it should be on what is central, and nothing is more central in Scripture than the triune God. It is not going too far to say that ignorance of the Trinity is ignorance of the gospel.¹ Thomas Aquinas voices a common opinion when he says, “All the knowledge imparted by faith revolves

1. Johann Gerhard: “If we are ignorant of or deny the mystery of the Trinity, we are ignorant of or deny the entire economy [οἰκονομία, i.e., administration] of salvation” (*Theological Commonplaces* III.1.7).

around these two points, the divinity of the Trinity and the humanity of Christ.”² Understanding the significance of Christ’s humanity requires a full view of his mission, which encompasses his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and continuing reign from heaven. Further, to know Christ is to know him as both man and God and so to perceive that he is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Hence, a deep understanding of Christ leads us to knowledge of the triune God. Conversely, knowledge of the Trinity is impossible apart from faith in Christ. In order to know one, we must know the other, such that Scripture tends to be theocentric and Christocentric in one breath.

Scripture displays this theocentric and Christocentric focus explicitly. After all, Aquinas’s comment is a gloss on Jesus’s prayer, “This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Eternal life consists in knowledge of God, not just any knowledge but specifically that which is found in and through Jesus Christ. These words come toward the end of Jesus’s high priestly prayer, building up to the climactic moments of his betrayal and crucifixion in the Gospel of John. Where the other Gospels narrate the Lord’s Supper before Christ’s passion, John instead gives us a lengthy discourse soaked through with important teaching on the centrality of Christ, the workings of the Trinity, and how these truths bear upon our discipleship (John 13:31–17:26). Occupying such a prominent place, knowledge of the triune God in Christ must be crucial and therefore worth pursuing. This is reinforced by the progression of Jesus’s concluding prayer, which consists of six requests that culminate with a petition that his disciples would see his eternal, divine glory: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24; cf. 17:5).³ This statement provides a window into the hope of John’s Gospel and arguably all of Scripture: that its readers will come to see the glory of Christ.⁴ The biblical metaphor of vision, about which we will say more below, here functions to tie together how the only true God will

2. Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology* 1.2. For similar statements, see Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.5; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 13.6.1.

3. This final request stands apart, since “I desire” (θέλω; John 17:24) lays greater stress on the petition than the previous “I ask” (ἔρωτῶ; 17:9, 15, 20); cf. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, 2:467. Our presentation of glory and the vision of God in John’s Gospel is indebted to Filtvedt, “The Transcendence and Visibility of the Father in the Gospel of John”; Chibici-Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten*, 512–631; Nielsen, “The Narrative Structures of Glory and Glorification in the Fourth Gospel.”

4. Hence, Jörg Frey concludes, “The goal of the Fourth Gospel’s distinctive presentation of Christ is that believers of later times see Jesus’ δόξα (17.24)” (*The Glory of the Crucified One*, 258).

be known as his glory is seen in the Christ he has sent. Stepping back for a moment to canvass what Scripture says about seeing God and how this is concentrated in Christ's glory will begin to orient this book's approach to its subject matter.

Jesus's prayer prompts two questions that are relevant to our inquiry. First, why does Jesus relate knowledge of himself and God the Father to vision, and why is this so important to John's Gospel and the story of Israel? Second, what does all this suggest about how we should pursue this knowledge through Scripture? Answering each of these questions will serve to paint in broad strokes the orientation of the following chapters. As we shall see, our overall goal for exegetically investigating the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology is to pursue, prayerfully, a vision of the risen Christ's glory through faith.

The Beatific Vision

The answer to the first question depends on the kind of knowledge under discussion. The goodness of the gospel's news is not only that we sinners are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ but also that we are promised future glory in the resurrection (Rom. 8:30; Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15). Intrinsic to this glory is a full knowledge and enjoyment of God, which Scripture often portrays through metaphors of sight and vision. Paul, for instance, parallels sight with knowledge when speaking of this future glory: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12 CSB; cf. Num. 12:8; 1 John 3:6). For this reason Christians speak of the "beatific vision," the eschatological vision of God that beatifies or renders us blessed. Theologians have long debated what blessedness is, but at its core blessedness is our highest hope, and it consists in an intimate communion with God that quiets our hearts' deepest longings and fills us with everlasting joy.⁵ Scripture expresses this hope through a variety of metaphors pertaining to light and glory, riches and treasures, Sabbath rest, and even the absence of sin and evil, as well as hunger and thirst.⁶ But through all of these, vision is central. Intrinsic to blessedness is this mysterious vision of God.⁷

The hope of beholding God is expressed throughout the OT:

5. Griffiths, *Decreation*, 217, provides a spare definition: "Beatitude . . . is an umbrella-word for whatever it is that constitutes the final and unsurpassable good for human creatures." The vision of God is intrinsic to blessedness since vision begets conformity to God, sufficiency in God, and full knowledge of God (Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae* 1.9).

6. See the catena of imagery and themes in Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 20.8.18–21.

7. See *Synopsis purioris theologiae* 39.33; 40.17.

- “As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness” (Ps. 17:15).
- “The LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face” (Ps. 11:7).
- “Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty” (Isa. 33:17).
- “In my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:26–27).⁸

And often this longing is juxtaposed with notions of presence and joy: “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11); “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple” (Ps. 27:4). From these witnesses alone, we conclude that the vision of God is something uniquely to be hoped for (“one thing”) and even something that may only happen fully in the flesh (“when I awake”; “in my flesh”).⁹

However, the hope of seeing God seems paradoxical. How may one see God if he is invisible? God is the one “who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16; 1:17; 1 John 4:12).¹⁰ The closer we get to the heart of biblical eschatology, the more this knot loosens. Throughout Scripture, God is clearly free to make himself visible in some manner when he pleases. Scripture does not shy away from the apparent oddity of this fact, expressing the tension explicitly when Moses is described as “seeing him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). In the aftermath of the exodus, Moses initially beholds God with the seventy elders of Israel on the mountain, before going further up the mountain on his own to enter the cloud of glory and speak with God (Exod. 24:9–18). Later, Moses speaks with God “face to face” in the tent of meeting on Israel’s behalf (Exod. 33:11; Deut. 34:10). These moments peak dramatically with Moses’s request to see God’s glory, at which point God warns him, “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Exod. 33:18–20). While Moses has spoken to God face-to-face, this somehow has not involved seeing God’s face. God nevertheless makes a concession of sorts and renders himself visible to Moses *indirectly*: “You shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (Exod. 33:23). What this

8. On the bodily language of God’s face and appearance, see Miller, *The Lord of the Psalms*, 32–38.

9. On theophanic psalms, see Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, 38–39.

10. Among contemporary theologians, Katherine Sonderegger gives forceful expression to God’s invisibility in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of God*. See also Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:29–52.

half-refusal suggests is that even though Moses has beheld God and spoken to God face-to-face, he has nevertheless not yet seen God's face directly.¹¹ Moses reinforces some such distinction when recounting Israel's experience at Sinai: "You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut. 4:12).¹² Furthermore, no other prophet arose in Israel like Moses, "whom the LORD knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). If no one saw God as intensely as Moses and yet even Moses only had an indirect vision, then why do we hope to see God "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12)?

The Invisible God's Visibility

There are hints in these episodes that, like a good teacher, God leads Moses step-by-step into a deeper friendship that ultimately points beyond Moses to something more to come. Retrospectively, we know that this "something more" is the new covenant whose mediator is Jesus Christ and whose promise is God's outpoured Spirit. The one mediator of the new covenant is like Moses, but better. Moses asked to see God's glory, but Jesus is this glory (Exod. 33:18; John 1:14; Heb. 1:3). Moses encountered God's glory in the tabernacle, but Jesus is the Word who "became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14; Exod. 33:7).¹³ Moses could only see God's glory indirectly, from behind, as God tells him, "There is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by" (Exod. 33:21–22). Whether the rock is the teaching of Christ one finds in the church or Christ himself, God's glory now encounters us in the man Jesus Christ.¹⁴ Specifically, we now behold the glory of God "passing by" in Christ's person, both in his

11. Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine both observe from this fact that Moses was unable to see God "according to God's true being" (ὡς ἐκεῖνός ἐστι) or "as He is," meaning God's incomprehensible essence; Moses nevertheless genuinely knew God. See Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* 2.230 (Malherbe and Ferguson, 114; GNO 7/1:114); Augustine, *Letter* 147.20 (WSA II/2:329); cf. also Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 28.3 (PPS 23:39).

12. In this respect, DeLapp, *Theophanic "Type-Scenes" in the Pentateuch*, 139, is correct to observe that Deuteronomy "provides a commentary for reading the narrative" at Sinai, which includes a "warning not to remember the scene as one including YHWH's form *in se*." Something similar would apply to Jacob's report of seeing God at the Jabbok, because what he saw was "a man" (Gen. 32:24; Hosea 12:4).

13. By "tabernacled" (ἐσκήνωσεν; cf. σκηνή in Exod. 25:9; 33:7 LXX), John hints at the incarnation as the fulfillment of the temple, and so records Jesus's explicit identification of himself with the temple in the following chapter (John 2:18–22).

14. For Augustine, the "rock" is Peter, the place is the church, and the glory that passes by is the humanity of Christ (*The Trinity* 2.30 [WSA I/5:122–23]). Gregory of Nazianzus construes the rock as "God the Word incarnate for us" (*Oration* 28.3 [PPS 23:39]; cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2.244).

earthly ministry and in his cross and resurrection (John 12:28).¹⁵ Consideration of each point will serve to demonstrate how it is that the invisible God stoops down for us to behold him.

First, God's glory becomes visible as it "passes by" in Christ's ministry. Consider Mark's portrait, in which, long before the disciples can "see" Jesus as the revelation of God, Jesus first sees them. As the disciples crossed the sea, Jesus "saw" the trouble of their passage through the winds, even amidst the darkness of the night. In view of their trouble, Jesus walks out to them intending "to pass by them" (Mark 6:48). As on the mountain, so also on the sea God passes by and reveals his glory (cf. 1 Kings 19:11).¹⁶ Christ can reveal God's glory in this way because he has seen God uniquely: "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18 AT); no one "has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father" (John 6:46). More than this, God's glory is now visible in the face of Christ, "the image of the invisible God," such that those who see him see the Father (Col. 1:15; cf. John 14:9).

Second, God's glory also "passes by" us in Christ's cross, resurrection, and ascension. In this respect especially, the *visio Dei* that we are given overturns any expectations we might naturally have. Isaiah speaks of the Servant's suffering as "without glory" (ἀδοξήσει [*adoxēsei*]; Isa. 52:14 LXX), but Jesus identifies himself as this Servant and makes his crucifixion the decisive revelation of God's glory (δόξα, *doxa*). Speaking of his glorification by the Father in being lifted up on the cross, Jesus says that "whoever sees me sees him who sent me" (John 12:45).¹⁷ When we understand these words in their larger context, Jesus is saying that God's glory will especially be seen in his inglorious crucifixion: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [ἐγὼ εἰμι, *egō eimi*]" (John 8:28).¹⁸ But however central the cross is,

15. On this unity of the cross and resurrection in John's Gospel, see Schnelle, "Cross and Resurrection in the Gospel of John"; Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John*, 92–98.

16. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 426, notes that "pass by" (παρελθεῖν) functions "almost" as a technical term for divine revelations in the LXX, being supplied in some instances where the corresponding verb was lacking in the MT (e.g., Gen. 32:31–32; Dan. 12:1). Further OT context reinforces this: only God "trampled the waves of the sea" and elusively "passes by me," says Job (Job 9:8, 11). Hence, it comes as no surprise that in this episode on the sea Jesus alludes to the burning bush: "Take heart, I am [ἐγὼ εἰμι]. Do not be afraid" (Mark 6:50 AT; cf. Exod. 3:14).

17. See Filtvedt, "The Transcendence and Visibility of the Father in the Gospel of John," 111–16.

18. As John shows in his use of Isaiah, Christ's being "lifted up" (ὕψωση) reveals God's glory (John 12:27–43). Of the four times that being "lifted up" and "exalted" are used together in Isaiah, three describe YHWH (Isa. 6:1; 33:10; 57:15), suggesting that these terms in conjunction are unique to God, who gives his glory to no other (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). The other instance describes the suffering Servant: "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and

there are other elements of the Son's glorification, since his resurrection and ascension return him to the glory he enjoyed with the Father before the world began (John 17:5). Even in Mark's story, Jesus comes to the disciples around "the fourth watch of the night" (Mark 6:48), or dawn, which Mark elsewhere uses as a poetic allusion to the resurrection: the darkness of Jesus's crucifixion is rolled back only with the rising of the sun on the third day (Mark 15:33; 16:2).¹⁹ We truly "see" God's glory in Christ's cross when we understand his death and resurrection as an act of love, the Son laying down and taking up his own life for his sheep (John 10:18; cf. 2:19). God's visibility is found in Jesus Christ crucified and risen or it is not found at all. We may see the Father in Christ, so we may not see him elsewhere or by other means. In Christ's resurrection and ascension, then, God's glory passes before us from Christ's grave to the Father's right hand. Just so, God confirms that he is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. 34:6–7).

The importance of Christ's Spirit further emphasizes this concentration of God's visibility in the crucified and risen Jesus. There are hints in Moses's ministry pointing us in this direction, as when he finds himself inadequate to mediate between God and Israel, and so wishes that all God's people were anointed with God's Spirit (Num. 11:29). God then apportions some of Moses's anointing to seventy elders who help to share his burden (Num. 11:16–30). This anticipates the new covenant promise, fulfilled at Pentecost, of the Holy Spirit being poured out on all God's people (Joel 2:28–29). Paul points to the Spirit's significance when discussing how seeing God's glory in Christ outweighs the glory of the old covenant. Moses's ministry was written on mere tablets of stone and, because he spoke to God face-to-face, was still glorious enough that the Israelites could not gaze upon him without a veil (2 Cor. 3:7–13; Exod. 34:25–29). But the new covenant is better because the Spirit writes on "tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3; cf. Jer. 31:31–33; Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26–27). For God's people, then, the indwelling Spirit removes the "veil" so that we may see God's glory in the mirror of Christ's flesh: "We

lifted up, and shall be exalted" (Isa. 52:13). John incorporates these associations in depicting the "glory" revealed on Christ's cross, which Isaiah "saw" (John 12:41), which reinforces that the Servant belongs to the identity of YHWH. See, further, Brendsel, "Isaiah Saw His Glory," 123–34; also C. H. Williams, "Johannine Christology and Prophetic Traditions."

19. The detail about the women arriving at the tomb "when the sun had risen" (Mark 16:2) has clear symbolic significance against the background of the OT. For example, in David's last words about "the son of Jesse . . . the man who was raised [ἀνέστησεν] on high, the anointed [χριστόν] of the God of Jacob," he says God "dawns on them [Israel] like the morning light" (2 Sam. 23:1–4 LXX). For this and other examples, see Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1083–84.

all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18 NKJV). The Holy Spirit has “shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

God’s Spirit enables us to behold God’s glory in Christ crucified. This eschatological work has a transformative effect on our lives now but will be complete only in the resurrection. Jesus’s desire for his disciples to see him, while primarily referring to a future vision, is nevertheless something held out to them now because they are already in one sense with him where he is by virtue of the Spirit’s presence.²⁰ What we grasp by faith in this life, we will behold by sight in the next: the man Jesus, the Lamb of God, the King in his beauty (cf. John 1:29; 3:14–15; 19:5). This sight of God will be no terror because we will be friends with God, holy as God is holy. The canon’s conclusion seals this hope’s importance when, at God’s renewal of all things, his servants “will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). To behold God is the startling possibility opened by the actuality of God’s self-diffusing light. The Son, who is Light from Light and is light itself (*αὐτοφῶς*, *autophōs*), shines in the darkness of our hearts by his Spirit so that we may see him together with the Father and the Spirit as the God who dwells in unapproachable light. Christ is the pure radiance of God himself making us pure, so that in God’s light we may see light (Ps. 36:9).

Much more could be said about the beatific vision, but this much suffices for our current purposes. Knowing God in Christ has a transforming effect because this knowledge is connected to the vision of Christ’s glory, which will be consummated at the end of all things. Beholding God in the face of Christ in the new creation, we will enjoy life eternal, perpetual peace, joy, and rest. This is our telos. God created us for his own glory, certainly, but God’s glory elicits our glorification. Irenaeus expresses the unity of these truths eloquently: “For the glory of God is the living human, but the life of the human is the vision of God. Indeed, if the manifestation of God through creation gives life to all things living on earth, much more does the revelation of the Father by the Word give life to those who see God.”²¹

We exist so that we might see God, intimately commune with him, and become decorated in his light. Before discussing how this telos bears on exegetical reason, we must first grasp something of how it bears on our lives. The vision of God is eschatological, after all. So how does it concern us now?

20. Chibici-Revneanu, *Die Herrlichkeit des Verherrlichten*, 304.

21. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.7 (SC 100.648 [AT]).

Ascesis and Vision-Shaped Attention

What the vision of God as our telos helps us to see is that we are attention-shaped creatures. Where our attention goes, our affections and actions follow. Various forms of this insight fuel portraits of the Christian life that emphasize an attentiveness to “heavenly” things with a corresponding, though qualified, detachment from this world. Qualified, because the detachment in question is a fruit of evangelical freedom from the tyranny of mundane goods, their empty promises and narrow possibilities. As C. S. Lewis observes, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.”²² A great “cloud of witnesses” would agree (Heb. 11:2–12:2). Since the Christian’s hope is to see Christ’s glory, then this heavenly frame focuses our attentions upward and reorders our loves and priorities. It structures our relationship with God and others and shapes how we suffer, lament, pray, pursue and receive temporal goods, and more.²³

Such reorientation involves elements of ascesis, the denial and disciplining of those impulses that would draw our attention away from Christ’s glory. In one of the concluding moments to a central section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns his listeners against treasuring things of this earth, for “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).²⁴ He extends this exhortation into the metaphor of vision: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy [or “simple,” ἀπλοῦς, *haplous*], your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad [or “wicked”], your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (Matt. 6:22–23; cf. Luke 11:34–36). The point is that our hearts’ attentions are morally determined, since whether we are full of light or darkness depends on where our treasure is and how that affects our lives.²⁵ To be “simple” we must become wholehearted in our attentiveness and devotion to God. To do this we must take not only every thought but also every desire captive to Christ. Wholeheartedness, or simplicity of heart, focuses our attention and love on God and leads to acts of generosity (part of the meaning of ἀπλότης [*haplotēs*], “simplicity”), whereas a wicked attention is torn from

22. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 134.

23. See esp. M. Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 89–132. It is also true that actions sharpen our attentions and desires, leading us to discover new things about our attentions, the things they focus on, and why. Nevertheless, it remains true that our hearts’ attentions hold a certain pride of place in shaping who we are and what we do.

24. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 237–44.

25. Allison, “The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body (Matthew 6.22–23=Luke 11.34–36),” esp. 76–78.

God by love of self, and thus is “double-minded” (James 1:8).²⁶ Hence, our attentions may be products of either sin’s darkness or the light of grace, which comes from God: “For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness” (Ps. 18:28). The exegetical relevance of these observations goes beyond the fact that our attention needs to be focused on the right object. In addition, the reader must become a particular kind of person to have this rightly ordered attention. In order to read with the kind of attention that corresponds to our telos, we need eyes that are simple, pure, and full of light.

Indeed, no small part of our discipleship consists in cultivating a vision-shaped attention through pursuit of the moral conditions suggested by Jesus’s words about our eyes:

- “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).
- Without holiness “no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).
- “Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:3).
- “With the purified you showed yourself pure” (Ps. 18:26; cf. 2 Sam. 22:27; Dan. 12:10).²⁷

However, these are not symbols for mere moral and intellectual virtues. Something far more radical is in view. Purity and holiness are important especially as they concern the knowledge of God in Christ because, under the sway of sin, our attentions are constantly dragged down toward created things. Therefore, so are our thoughts about God. Given these circumstances, Augustine cautions us that idolatry inevitably results if we seek God with our own resources and desires, even if they rise to the highest cultural standards of intellectual and moral excellence.²⁸ The problem is that we are sinners whose loves stretch out to the wrong things, or the right things in the wrong ways, and whose pride looks for ways to think and speak (or not) about God apart from the embarrassment of Christ’s cross. Our souls are sick, and so we need a remedy that reaches as deep as the problem; we need to have our “sickly gaze” purified and our loves reordered.²⁹ Hence, “Our minds must be purified so that they

26. On the moral significance of simplicity in Scripture, see Spicq, “La vertu du simplicité dans l’ancien et le nouveau testament.”

27. For an informed overview of historical approaches to the beatific vision, centered on interpretations of Matt. 5:8, see Allison, “Seeing God (Matt. 5:8),” in *Studies in Matthew*, 43–63.

28. Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.1; *On Christian Teaching* 1.9.

29. Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.2 (WSA 1/5:66); *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 1.19. This is a common emphasis in the fathers: “For one who is not pure to lay hold of pure things is dangerous, just as it is for weak eyes to look at the sun’s brightness” (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 27.3 [PPS 23:27]; on this theme, see Beeley, *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and*

are able to perceive that light and then hold fast to it.”³⁰ For these reasons, he notes, “What calls for all our efforts in this life is the healing of the eyes of our hearts, with which God is to be seen.”³¹

Augustine recognizes, however, that our purification is not something we can muster up with our own strenuous effort. In order for us to perceive God’s glory in the crucified and risen Christ, God himself must purify our hearts’ vision: “The only thing to cleanse the wicked and the proud is the blood of the just man and the humility of God; to contemplate God, which by nature we are not, we would have to be cleansed by him who became what by nature we are and what by sin we are not.”³² In sin we “fall short of the glory of God” and therefore cannot perceive God’s glory in the person of Christ (Rom. 3:23).³³ Hence, to perceive Christ’s glory, we need Christ: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27); he “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). His self-giving, from the cross to his entrance into God’s presence in heaven, is therefore an act of “making purification for sins” (Heb. 1:3; 1 John 1:7). All the regulations for purity in the old covenant pointed to Christ because of their merely provisional nature, but by his blood and the washing of regeneration, those who belong to Christ and are united to him may “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22; cf. Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Though in sin we fall short of God’s glory, by faith in Christ “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). We are therefore purified “by faith” (Acts 15:9) and the righteousness that comes through it (Rom. 4:13). As unbelief and impurity are treated synonymously (Titus 1:15), so too are faith and

the Knowledge of God, 65–90). Cyril of Alexandria likewise comments: “Those who have a pure heart would surely be none other than those who, by union with God through the Son in the Spirit, have abandoned all love of the flesh and have driven worldly pleasure as far away as possible, who have denied their own lives, as it were, and have offered themselves only to the will of the Spirit, living a pure life completely devoted to Christ” (*Commentary on John* 11.12, on John 17:24 [Maxwell, 2:308]).

30. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 1.10 (Green, 12).

31. Augustine, *Sermon* 88.5 (WSA III/3:422).

32. Augustine, *The Trinity* 4.4 (WSA I/5:155).

33. On the extent of our defilement and God’s provision for purification, which is one part of our sanctification, see Owen, *Pneumatologia*, 4.4–5 (*Works* 3:422–67).

purity, from which acts of love follow: “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). The obedience in question is the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 10:16; 16:26), often tested and confirmed in its purity by trials and suffering (1 Pet. 1:6–7). Faith is in this sense the instrumental cause of our purification, not on account of faith as such, but on account of its object: faith receives the purifying work of Christ and his Spirit. Peter says of the gentiles: “God . . . by giving them the Holy Spirit . . . cleansed their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8–9). It is the person and work of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit this work secures, that are the center of gravity—not the act of faith as such. Faith, as it were, opens the heart’s mouth and draws in the Spirit (πνεῦμα [*pneuma*], “breath”).³⁴ And the Spirit in turn draws us into the life of God as adopted children and away from the life of the flesh. Because faith entails repentance, reconciliation, and humility, it trains our attention on what is above and away from what is below, including what is earthly in us.³⁵ Faith thus lifts our attention to Christ and his kingdom: “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1–2).³⁶ These imperatives imply knowledge that begets desire. The more we see Christ’s beauty, the more beautiful we will find him, and we become like what we love and worship.³⁷

The connection with love is important, because love is the flowering of an active faith. Where faith introduces knowledge of something, love propels us toward an even greater intimacy with it. Love, after all, is a unitive force that assimilates the lover to the beloved. Faith in Christ therefore redirects our love toward him and conforms us to his image, reorienting our attention to the “things that are above.” If faith did not work by love in this way, it would not be saving faith but mere “knowledge about” God, which leaves us defenseless against the many things that can cloud our vision. But since it is more than mere cognition, faith involves the will’s assent and trust, and on this account moves us to hope and love. Hence, when the eschatological vision of God shapes our attention by faith, it is imperative to “put to death

34. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 6.1 (FC 107:3).

35. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.7.1.

36. The same thought is expressed elsewhere: “We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18); “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5; cf. Phil. 2:5).

37. Beale, *We Become What We Worship*; Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*.

... what is earthly” and “put on” the virtues of the kingdom (Col. 3:5–17; cf. Phil. 3:8–16).

God begins our purification through faith and will consummate it at Christ’s return. Your life is “hidden with Christ in God,” Paul says, and when “Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:3–4). In this framework, what propels our pursuit of holiness is eschatological hope rather than some nostalgia for innocence.³⁸ All of this is possible because the saints have a foretaste of this hope now: “Like the Israelites, they have some clusters of Canaan’s grapes, some of the fruits of the good land by the way, as a specimen and pledge of what they shall enjoy when they come into that better country.”³⁹ Among such “fruits” are those of the Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance and therefore the one who enables us to behold Christ by faith in this life (Gal. 5:22–24; Eph. 1:13–14). By holding on to Christ, faith follows God’s glory as it passes by, from the face of Moses, to the shores of Galilee, through the hall of Pontius Pilate, into the darkness of Golgotha and Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb, spanning the depths of the dead and the heights of the Father’s right hand.

Disciples of Christ are called to behold his glory as the crucified and risen emissary of the Father. Far from being a merely intellectual pursuit, this calling claims our whole lives. To become those whose attentions are fixed on Christ and his kingdom, the “things that are above,” we must undergo the ascetical obedience of faith. We must embrace the good news about Christ and the bad news about ourselves that this entails. We must cast ourselves at his feet, hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so work out our salvation with fear and trembling. God’s grace thus prepares us for glory: “Music hath no pleasure in it unto them that cannot hear; nor the most beautiful colours unto them that cannot see. . . . Heaven itself would not be more advantageous unto persons not renewed by the Spirit of grace in this life.”⁴⁰ This much is required of disciples. What does this require of our exegesis?

Faith, Contemplation, and Exegesis

So far we have canvassed the telos of Christ’s disciples and the way that leads there, through Christ and the Spirit, whom we receive by the gift of faith. In Jesus’s high-priestly prayer, he desires that we “see” his glory (John 17:24; 19:35). This is only possible for those whose wayward attentions have been

38. M. Allen, *Grounded in Heaven*, 145–46.

39. Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* 7.11.

40. Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ I* (Works 1:291).

purified by Christ and the Spirit through faith. Christ must “sprinkle the doorposts of our mind, contemplation and action, with the great and saving token, with the blood of the new covenant.”⁴¹ In this final section, we need to expound a bit further the distinction between faith and sight as well as their connection, so that we may understand how faith cultivates its vision of Christ through exegetical reasoning.

Faith and Sight

Though faith and sight are distinct, they are also both described with visual metaphors and are therefore linked together. Their distinction is clear: “We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:6-7); “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). In Scripture, hope also is distinguished from sight, and linked to faith: “Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8:24–25); “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

The connection between faith and sight needs to be spelled out since faith is also an act of seeing or beholding: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12); “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord . . . [we all] are being transformed” (2 Cor. 3:18 NKJV). In light of what has already been said about faith and the beatific vision, we can see that faith and sight are connected in at least two ways.⁴² First, as we have established, faith and sight have the same object, which is the crucified and risen Christ’s glory. The difference lies in this: whereas faith beholds Christ’s glory enigmatically in the gospel, the blessed vision of God beholds Christ’s glory clearly and in its full splendor. In this life there are times when it is difficult to perceive Christ’s glory (Job 23:8–9), when God’s absence is felt more than his presence.⁴³ The beatific vision leaves no room for such interruptions and withdrawals. Then, “we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Second, and beyond this, faith is connected to vision because faith leads to and is consummated in it. Especially Paul’s contrasts between “partial” and “perfect” and “child” and “man” suggest that the relation between faith and sight is one of part to whole, lesser to greater (1 Cor. 13:8–12). Blessedness comes with vision, but faith already renders us blessed in the sense that it

41. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 16.11 (NPNF² 7:251).

42. Much more needs to be said to flesh out the relationship between faith and sight. See, further, Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* XII–XIV (Works 1:374–415).

43. See Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* XIII (Works 1:389–408).

tethers us to what is not yet: eschatological glory at the vision of God (Luke 1:45; 11:28). Faith thus relates to vision as grace does to glory, or sanctification to glorification. “Grace is nothing else than glory begun, as glory is grace consummated.”⁴⁴ In its opening toward realities beyond our reach, faith latches onto an object that will one day no longer be hoped for but fully present. Glorification and blessedness are the perfection of what is only inchoate in faith; here we are transformed and renewed “day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16), and “what we will be has not yet appeared,” but there our transformation will be complete and “we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2; cf. Rom. 8:29–30).

Yet the link between faith and sight is important for our happiness now. Even if full joy, peace, and rest will only be ours at the resurrection and glorification of the body, faith still offers a foretaste of these realities now: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:8–9).

Contemplation

When attempting to explain the relation between faith and vision, many theologians have appealed to some account of “contemplation” (θεωρία, *theōria*) to wed the movements of reason in this life to its rest in the next. The difficulty with the concept of contemplation is just how varied, and sometimes elusive, treatments of it are.⁴⁵ That said, within most treatments one may find a common conviction that whatever else it entails and consists in, contemplation of divine realities is a spiritual vision of spiritual truth (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13). Generally, contemplation is a form of “spiritual perception,” and we can understand it better by unpacking that phrase.

First, contemplation is a *spiritual* vision (θεωρία πνευματική, *theōria pneumatikē*) because it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a divine sense for divine

44. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 20.8.2 (Giger, 3:608). Polanus states that faith is therefore the instrumental cause of beatitude (*Syntagma theologiae christianae* 1.6 [9i]). Cyril of Alexandria illustrates the relationship between faith and sight: “When the night is dark, the bright beauty of the stars can be seen as each one sends out its light, but when the sun rises with its radiance, the partial light now disappears and the brilliance of the stars grows weak and ineffective” (*Commentary on John* 11.2, on John 16:25 [Maxwell, 2:264]). See also, e.g., Augustine, *Enchiridion* 1.5; Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology* 2.1.

45. In many authors, the “vision” (θεωρία) implied in contemplation pertains to a special perception of Scripture’s deeper meaning, along with the various connections and implications of those truths (so Gregory of Nyssa) and especially the ways the mystery of Christ is disclosed therein (so Cyril of Alexandria). In general, it designates a focused form of “theological reflection” on Scripture (A. N. Williams, *Divine Sense*, 140).

truth. Something very much like this is suggested by Paul after he discusses the glory of the new covenant in contrast to the old. When he situates his own ministry within this glorious new covenant, he acknowledges that the gospel is more than veiled to some: “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). The vision in question is to a significant extent intellectual, for it is the unbelievers’ *minds* that have been blinded to the light by Satan and who therefore have no sight of the truth.

Contemplation’s character as a gift has at least two corollaries worth mentioning. On the one hand, it is not reserved for a religious elite or only those with certain intellectual abilities. Contemplation involves the intellect in accordance with an individual’s capacities rather than bypassing them for a mystical escape from self-consciousness.⁴⁶ On the other hand, contemplation in the minimal sense defined above is not reserved for those whose ascetical heroism especially ennobles them to the light. Beholding Christ’s glory in faith is a possibility freely given to us on account of Christ’s objective work and our union with him by the Spirit. United thus to Christ, “we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” (Eph. 3:12). Contemplation should center our attention on the drama and power of God’s objective work in Christ rather than on the subjective dramas, or putative powers, of the human soul. But such concentration on *this* objective reality is possible only for saving faith, which works by love.

Second, contemplation is a spiritual perception in the sense of sight, not with the physical eyes but with the mind’s eye. When theologians describe contemplation as an “intuitive knowledge,” they mean something like an apprehension of the truth rather than the acts of reasoning that lead us there. This is why contemplation is also like a “gaze”: we do not have to reason about the colors we perceive in a painting because they are present to us in the mere act of gazing.⁴⁷ When Jesus expresses his desire for his disciples to see him, he promises a future vision of his glory of which we have a foretaste in faith. However, the perception of contemplation is a form of spiritual insight into Christ’s person that joins knowledge and affection together through faith. In this sense, “everyone who looks [θεωρῶν, *theōrōn*] on the Son and believes in him” will have “eternal life” (John 6:40). And Stephen is able to suffer like Jesus because he “gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God” (Acts 7:55).

46. Since the intellect’s role is proportionate to an individual’s cognitive capacities, contemplation is held out to all believers regardless of cognitive ability.

47. See, e.g., Augustine, *The Trinity* 15.45; Aquinas, *STh* II-II.180; Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae* 1.8 (11g).

Third, contemplation is determined by our telos and therefore focuses on God's truth in and through Christ, in whom "all things hold together" and "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 1:17; 2:3). Christ is the Truth. Therefore truth's unity may be perceived in his light: "Everything which faith ought to contemplate is exhibited to us in Christ."⁴⁸ The telos of contemplation is the apprehension of truth, and Truth himself reigns as the Alpha and Omega. Therefore, contemplation beholds the Truth as an end in itself, needing no further justification, such as "practical" benefits (though there are such benefits). God uses contemplation to purge us of idolatry. This idolatry includes an idolatrous utilitarian rationality, according to which anything, even God, is interesting to us only insofar as we can "get" something more important out of it. In this respect, beholding Christ's glory in faith is supremely "useless." But uselessness is not the same as worthlessness, because God is the fountain of all goodness, truth, and beauty. Beholding God is infinitely worthwhile because he is infinitely delightful. There is nothing more true, more interesting, or more worthy of our attention than God. Contemplation seeks to know and enjoy God in Christ for his own sake, because it begins in astonishment and is restless until it finds its rest in him.⁴⁹

Exegesis

Contemplation bears upon the task of exegesis to the extent that we seek God's face in the "face of God for now"—that is, Scripture.⁵⁰ Exegesis shapes contemplation, and contemplation shapes exegesis. We will close this chapter by teasing out both of these truths.

Exegesis shapes contemplation in the sense that, this side of the coming resurrection, we behold Christ through the testimony of his prophets and apostles as the Spirit opens our minds and hearts to give us understanding. The distinctions between faith and sight apply here. Exegetical reasoning is a discursive process that takes time and admits of fits and starts. None of this is true of the sight to which faith will one day give way. However, just as faith leads to sight, so too the discursive activity of exegesis is meant to lead to the spiritual perception of Christ's glory. What we are after in contemplation is a form of reasoning with the grain of Scripture that is open to truths transcending our natural senses, truths that require a "divine sense" to perceive. As it relates to exegesis, then, we may define contemplation as

48. Calvin, *Commentary on Ephesians* 3:12.

49. Cf. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 1.3–5; *Confessions* 1.1. For a brief, practical overview of contemplation, see Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:652–58.

50. Augustine, *Sermon 22.7* (WSA III/2:46).

follows: *Contemplation is a spiritual perception of Scripture's deepest truths relating to Christ's glory, in a manner that stirs up delight and conforms us to Christ.* Christ's "glory" here includes not only the divinity he possesses with the Father and Holy Spirit but also the whole mystery of his incarnation, passion, resurrection, and return by which that glory is made known to us.⁵¹ Moreover, contemplation stirs up delight and effects conformity to Christ because it cultivates a knowledge characterized by friendship rather than mere acquaintance (John 15:15). Contemplation therefore engages both the intellect and the affections in response to a sight that astonishes them. Contemplation is no mere intellectual pursuit, because knowledge that leaves the affections behind carries no conviction and ends up in atheism, just as affection that leaves behind knowledge runs into superstition and sentimentalism.⁵² Understanding the doctrinal content of the Christian faith is one thing; knowing and delighting in God is another. Knowledge as such is not always friendship.

In turn, contemplation shapes exegesis by intensifying its focus and broadening its reach, within the bounds of Scripture. In reading Scripture we are not called to mere observation of the text and its truths, but rather to "penetratingly reflect upon the matters themselves."⁵³ That is, a properly theological exegesis is one in which the reader's attention is oriented by the beatific vision and which therefore has Christ's glory as its object rather than the text or its natural properties in isolation.⁵⁴ Such exegesis is still a reasoning process, as we will see in chapter 3. It involves gathering together what the various parts of Scripture say about the glory of Christ by way of anticipation and retrospection and comparing these truths together. But it proceeds to a further step of prayerfully meditating on these truths until they form a comprehensive impression on our minds that prompts praise. Faith contemplates the deepest significance it may of such matters as Christ's divinity, his relation to the Father and the Spirit, his humanity and the mission for which he became incarnate, and more. Therefore, to behold Christ's glory we will have to see how this glory is displayed across the whole canon and how it reaches singular heights in his cross and resurrection. This contemplative exegesis will lead us to think long and hard about apparently recondite matters. Yet such matters are intrinsic to faith's object. Biblical reasoning will prove contemplative, in

51. Cf. Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* intro., q. 1, c. 3.

52. Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ XIII* (*Works* 1:401).

53. Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:653.

54. The text's natural properties—its historical and material circumstances, authorship, destination, and so forth—are part of what the text *is*, and so they *are* matters of importance for theological exegesis.

part, by how extensively and intensively it attends to this object, the crucified and risen Christ.

Contemplation by faith anticipates vision and tastes some crumbs from its banquet table. There is a promise here for exegesis: when it pursues the knowledge and enjoyment of God in Christ, it becomes a means of cultivating faith's foretaste of vision and therefore becomes a work of God's grace in our own sanctification. What else could this be but a work of grace, since orienting our attentions to confessing the truth requires a renovation of our intellect and will that only God can effect? Being renewed by God's grace, our redirected attentions become further vehicles of that grace, as they enable us to be conformed to the image of God's Son. As we focus on the crucified and risen Christ's glory, we come to a greater understanding of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). This is to a large degree the purpose of John's Gospel and, implicitly, all of Scripture. The evangelist hopes that his readers would become like the "beloved disciple" and thus blessed as those who believe without having seen: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:29–31).⁵⁵ After all, the beloved disciple is the one who "believed" upon seeing, not the risen Jesus, but the empty tomb (John 20:8–9). The fact that John's testimony is "written" means that it is now in textual form. It therefore demands acts of reading, hearing, and proclamation. The question posed to us as readers is whether we will be "those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Will our acts of reading be those of beloved disciples?

The dominant intellectual cultures of modern biblical scholarship often, though not always, resist applying the yoke of discipleship to the reading of Holy Scripture. However, understanding Scripture requires that we sit at the feet of Jesus and follow him if we are to see him (Luke 10:41–42; 24:13–35). What does this mean, and what further insight might it have for cultivating expectant exegesis? Exploring this theme is the burden of the next chapter.

55. See Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John*, 170–76. John's perfect passive "are written" (γέγραπται) is intriguing for at least two reasons. First, it "objectifies the transition from orality to writing; it signals that it's indeed a work written in the past, but whose reading remains offered to every potential reader" (Zumstein, *L'Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 2:296). The book is addressed to *us*. Second, this is a verb John reserves up to this point in his Gospel for Scripture (e.g., 2:17; 6:31; 8:17), providing subtle insight into John's understanding of his own book (Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 2:1215).